



If you think
you have to choose
between lunch
and a walk,
try these quickie
midday meals

grab 'n go lunches

When your stomach is roaring with midday hunger, it's hard to pass up lunch for the great outdoors. But there's no need to choose. We've got six terrific solutions for the time-crunched—all quick, delicious meals you can prepare ahead and pack to go. These fast-track lunches do more than deliver healthy nutrients: Each one is customized to move you closer to your personal goal for the day. So whether you're looking to fuel a walk, lift your mood, de-stress, or shed pounds, there's a noon-time meal here for you.

BY ELIZABETH SOMER, RD
■ RECIPES BY DEVIN ALEXANDER



SPRING
ORZO
SALAD
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GOAL**lift your spirits**

When you're feeling gloomy, you need exercise, fresh air—and carbohydrates. Being outdoors and getting your body moving will help shift your outlook, and eating carbs will stimulate production of your own natural mood-booster, serotonin. Studies examining the link between a low level of this brain chemical, which is associated with depression, and cravings for carbohydrate-rich foods suggest that we unwittingly self-medicate with food. For example, people who battle the winter blues (seasonal affective disorder, or SAD) and women plagued with PMS crave carbohydrates during their cyclic bouts of depression and lethargy.

One major caveat: Though carbs from pie to pasta might do the trick initially, refined carbs won't sustain a mood lift for long, and sugary foods will leave you feeling blue after a short high. So work

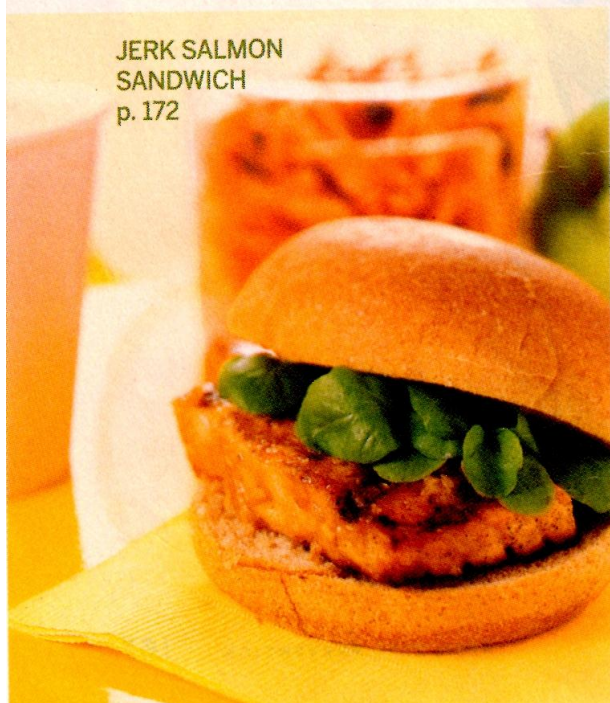
with your body's chemistry to lift your spirits and keep the smile on your face: Skip the cookies in the employee lounge, and raise your serotonin level with our **Spring Orzo Salad**, crunchy carrot sticks, and a juicy orange.

GOAL**boost your brainpower**

A good walk gets your heart pumping, which helps clear your head, but to process information, concentrate, and keep your memory sharp, nerves in your brain need to be constantly bathed in the right nutrients. (Maintaining clear arteries, the supply lines to your brain, depends on a healthy diet, too.) The double-duty nutrients that help prevent blood clots from forming and protect your nervous system are the omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish, such as salmon and mackerel.

A wealth of research shows that consistently consuming omega-3s helps improve thinking, possibly by improving brain cell function, nerve conduction, and nerve chemical release. Animal studies indicate that these fatty acids also increase learning ability and memory. Researchers at the Rush Institute for Healthy Aging in Chicago found that men and women who ate at least one serving of fish a week were much less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease later in life compared with those who hardly ever ate fish. To boost your brainpower, eat two servings a week of cold-water fish to maintain healthy omega-3 levels. Our **Jerk Salmon Sandwich** brings

**JERK SALMON
SANDWICH**
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PHOTOS BY DAVID PRINCE; FOOD STYLING BY MEGAN FAWN SCHLOW; PROP STYLING BY STEPHANIE BASRALIAN

you halfway to that goal. Eat it with a carrot-and-raisin salad and an apple for dessert and you'll get mind-protecting antioxidants, too.

GOAL
**build up your
body's
defenses**

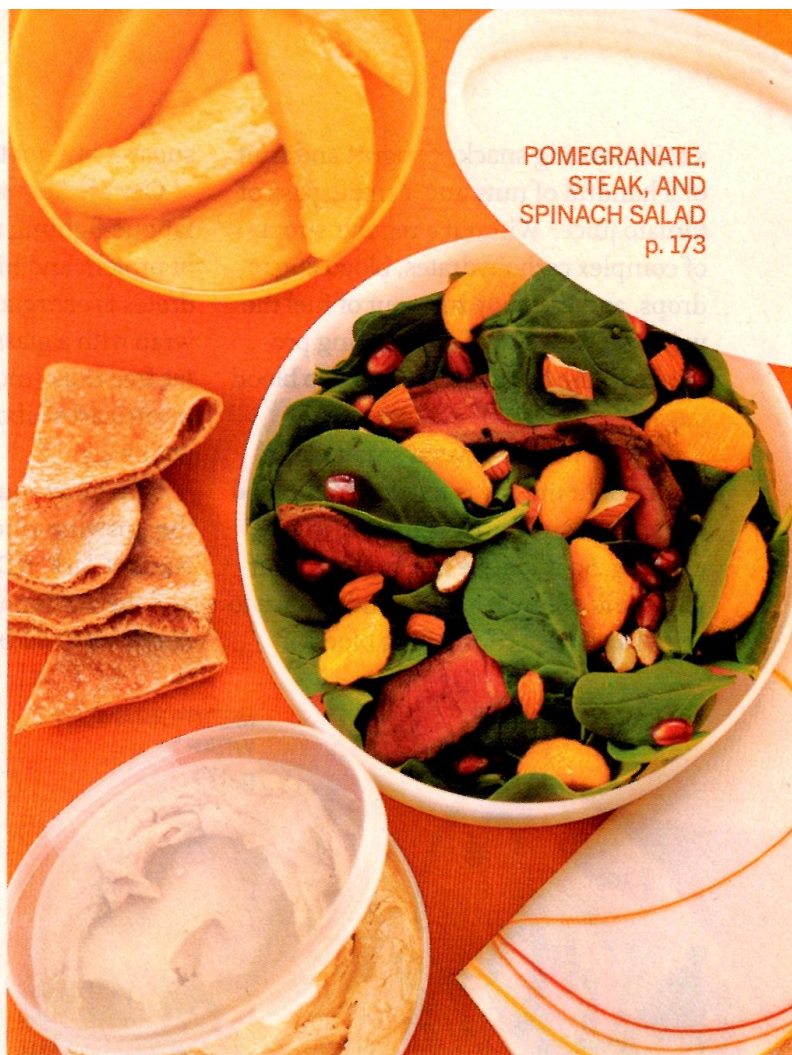
Don't want an early-spring cold to interrupt your walking routine? Keep your immune system primed to fight viruses by packing your meals with protective antioxidants. Fruits and vegetables are good sources of vitamins C and E and a host of phytochemicals.

Researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer

Research Center in Seattle found that these nutrients help stimulate enzymes that curb cancer-causing substances and rev up the immune system. What's more, people who feast on fruits and vegetables experience less severe symptoms and recover more quickly if they do become sick than people whose immune systems are weakened by deficiencies, says Jeffrey Blumberg, PhD, of the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University.

A salad for lunch, such as our colorful **Pomegranate, Steak, and Spinach Salad**

**POMEGRANATE,
STEAK, AND
SPINACH SALAD**
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with mandarin oranges, plus sliced peaches for dessert, take you half the way toward the nine servings of veggies and fruit that you need every day. Dip whole wheat pita wedges in hummus for some protein and complex carbs.

GOAL
energize your day

If you feel just too tired to take a walk come lunchtime, you may not be eating enough in the morning. Are you starting your day with a healthy balance of protein and carbs? Do you take 5 minutes for

a midmorning snack of yogurt and fruit or a handful of nuts and a small glass of tomato juice? Without a regular supply of complex carbohydrates, blood sugar drops, and the body runs out of fuel the way a car runs out of gas. Having protein with the carbs also helps keep blood sugar steady.

The purpose of several small meals throughout the day is to keep your blood sugar even and curb overeating in the evening. So if fatigue is a factor in your day, think of lunch as a second chance to refuel and raise your falling blood

sugar—but not too high or too fast.

Our **Mediterranean Wrap** is the ideal, fatigue-fighting meal. The combination of protein and high-quality carbohydrates is energizing yet light. Have the wrap with a glass of fortified soy milk or fat-free milk (more protein) and grapes (more carbs) about 30 minutes *before* your walk.

“That way your blood sugar is on the upswing when you exercise,” says Nancy Clark, RD, a sports nutritionist and the author of *Nancy Clark’s Sports Nutrition Guidebook*.

MEDITERRANEAN
WRAP
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GOAL de-stress

Soup and chocolate may be your best friends on days when your stress level peaks before noon. A University of Illinois survey of nearly 1,500 people found that most men’s idea of comfort food included a meal of something hearty like soup, while women preferred snacks of something chocolate and creamy, like ice cream.

Animal research has confirmed that a sweet dessert is a proven stress-soother. When University of California, San Francisco, physiologist Mary Dallman, PhD, let anxious rats

feast on high-energy foods such as sucrose and lard, they had a lower stress response than rats fed regular chow.

"The hormones that prompt the typical fight-or-flight response signal the brain to seek calorie-packed foods—like sweets and fat—which rein in the stress," says Dallman.

Man or woman, you can cover all your bases—calm down, comfort yourself, and maintain a slim waist, to boot—with our broth-based **Garden Vegetable Soup with Grilled Chicken**. (A cream-based soup would be comforting, too, but the extra calories could add up to more stress for the weight-conscious.) To round out your meal and further soothe your soul, have a taste of chocolate decadence, such as a bowl of fiber-rich strawberries dunked in dark chocolate syrup. When you must have a sweet dessert, this is a heart-healthy, low-calorie way to get your chocolate fix. Your walk will take care of any lingering stress hormones.

GOAL burn fat

To stack your nutritional deck in favor of weight loss, you want a meal that's mostly carbs and protein, calcium rich, water packed, and high in fiber. Here's why:

First, if you don't burn all your lunch calories walking, your body will convert the extras to fat for storage, and packing away carb and protein calories actually uses up some of the excess. (Fat calories, on the other hand, are moved more efficiently and so use less energy.) Second, calcium-rich foods are slimming.



GARDEN
VEGETABLE
SOUP WITH
GRILLED
CHICKEN
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Numerous studies, including one from Creighton University's Osteoporosis Research Center, have found that when cutting back on calories, women who consume the calcium equivalent of four glasses of milk a day lose significantly more weight than those on low-calcium diets. And finally, high-fiber foods that also contain a lot of water, such as fruit smoothies and vegetable soups, are especially filling.

Our 16-ounce **Green Tea, Blueberry, and Banana Smoothie** fits the weight loss bill. Swiss research suggests that the metabolic boost that comes with drinking green tea at every meal is significant enough to shift your body composition and will, over time, make a dent in your body fat.

Accompany the smoothie with half a whole wheat bagel spread with a tablespoon of peanut butter to satisfy your urge to chew something and to get a satisfying bit of healthy fat and carbs.

eat to meet your goals

Spring Orzo Salad

PREP TIME 10 minutes

COOKING TIME 9 minutes

- $\frac{2}{3}$ c orzo
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c finely chopped red bell pepper
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c finely chopped orange bell pepper
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c finely chopped and seeded tomatoes
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c quartered dry-packed sun-dried tomatoes
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c chopped scallions
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c chopped watercress
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c crumbled reduced-fat feta cheese
- 2 tsp fresh lemon juice

1. Prepare orzo per package directions.
2. Meanwhile, mix all remaining ingredients in medium bowl.
3. Mix orzo with vegetable mixture until well combined. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve immediately or store and refrigerate in plastic container to go.

Makes 2 servings

PER SERVING 343 cal, 14 g pro, 53 g carb, 9 g fat, 3 g sat fat, 7 mg chol, 4 g fiber, 461 mg sodium

Jerk Salmon Sandwich

PREP TIME 5 minutes

COOKING TIME 8 minutes

- 2 tsp dry jerk seasoning
(found in spice aisle of most major grocery stores)

2 4-oz boneless, skinless salmon fillets

1 Tbsp prepared horseradish

$\frac{1}{4}$ c all-fruit apricot preserves

2 whole grain hamburger buns

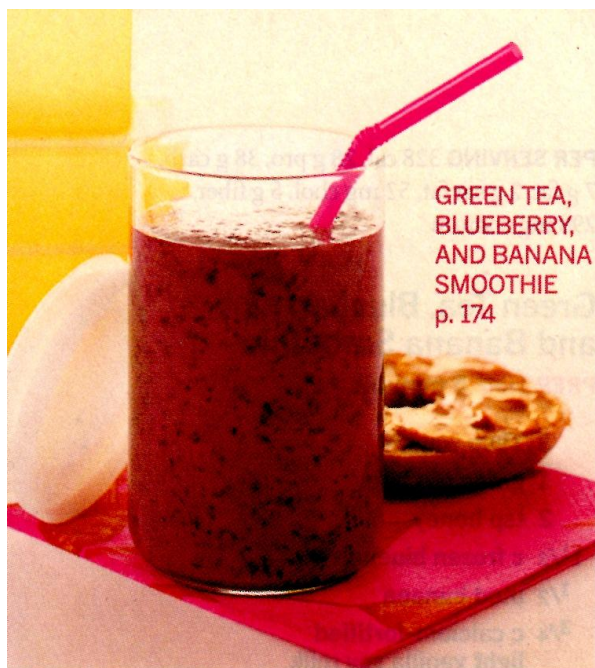
$\frac{1}{4}$ c watercress (optional)

1. Coat grill well with olive or canola oil before cooking to prevent fish from sticking. Preheat to high.
2. Rub 1 teaspoon of the seasoning onto each fillet to cover on all sides.
3. Place fillets on grill and cook 3 to 4 minutes on each side or until fish is just opaque.
4. Meanwhile, stir horseradish into preserves until well combined.
5. Approximately 1 minute before salmon is cooked, place buns, insides face down, on grill to toast. Remove buns and place 1 fillet on bottom half of each. Spoon half of preserve mixture on top of each fillet, add watercress, if using, and cover with bun lids. Serve immediately.

Makes 2

PER SERVING 402 cal, 30 g pro, 49 g carb, 10 g fat, 2 g sat fat, 72 mg chol, 3 g fiber, 566 mg sodium

Note Salmon can be made ahead of time and then wrapped in plastic wrap and refrigerated overnight. In the morning, unwrap salmon, place on untoasted bun, and top with sauce. Place in ziplock bag and refrigerate until ready to eat. (Wrap watercress separately, if using.) To serve, remove from bag, place between 2 paper plates, and microwave on low until just warm. Add watercress and eat immediately.



GREEN TEA,
BLUEBERRY,
AND BANANA
SMOOTHIE
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Pomegranate, Steak, and Spinach Salad

PREP TIME 15 minutes

COOKING TIME 6 minutes

- 1 Tbsp + 1½ tsp pomegranate juice
- 1½ tsp white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp olive oil
- ¼ tsp honey
- 3 c loosely packed baby spinach leaves
- ¼ c juice-packed mandarin oranges, drained
- 2 Tbsp fresh pomegranate seeds
- 1 Tbsp roasted, unsalted almonds
- 3 oz lean steak, such as top round or London broil

1. In small bowl, whisk juice, vinegar, mustard, oil, and honey.
2. In large bowl, combine spinach, oranges, seeds, and almonds and toss, adding all but 2 teaspoons of the dressing. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Lightly spray steak with oil and sauté in small skillet over medium-high heat until done (3 minutes per side for medium-rare). Remove from heat and set aside 3 minutes.

4. Slice steak thinly, top salad with slices, and drizzle with remaining dressing. Serve immediately or refrigerate in plastic container to go.

Makes 1 serving

PER SERVING 356 cal, 19 g pro, 34 g carb, 15 g fat, 3 g sat fat, 41 mg chol, 5 g fiber, 238 mg sodium

Mediterranean Wrap

PREP TIME 5 minutes

- 1 lg whole wheat tortilla
- 2 Tbsp garlic-flavored hummus
- ¼ c roasted red pepper strips
- 4 slices roast turkey breast (see note)
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh mint leaves
- ¼ c lettuce (optional)

1. Lay tortilla flat on large cutting board. Spoon hummus evenly over tortilla to within ½" of edge. Lay peppers evenly over hummus. Layer on turkey slices. Sprinkle with mint. Layer on lettuce leaves, if desired. Fold in sides and then roll to form wrap. Cut diagonally in half.
2. Serve immediately or wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate.

Makes 1

PER SERVING 323 cal, 35 g pro, 31 g carb, 7 g fat, 0.4 g sat fat, 61 mg chol, 4 g fiber, 543 mg sodium

Note Deli turkey is high in sodium. If no-salt or lower-sodium roast turkey breast isn't

available at your market, coat 1/2"-thick turkey breast fillet with olive oil spray and sauté in small skillet over medium heat until cooked through (about 4 minutes per side).

Garden Vegetable Soup with Grilled Chicken

PREP TIME 12 minutes

COOKING TIME 30 minutes

- 1¹/₃ c vegetable or multicolored rotini pasta
- 1 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- ³/₄ c 1/2" chunks red onion
- 2 cloves garlic, quartered
- 1 tsp chopped fresh oregano or 1/4 tsp dried
- 4 c reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 can (14¹/₂ oz) reduced-sodium diced tomatoes, drained
- ¹/₂ c chopped carrots
- 8 oz grilled chicken breast, chopped
- ¹/₂ c chopped fresh basil

1. Prepare pasta per package directions.
2. Meanwhile, in medium saucepan over medium heat, add oil then onion, garlic, and oregano. Cook, stirring often, until onions and garlic are tender, about 7 minutes.
3. Add broth and bring mixture to a boil.
4. Add tomatoes and carrots. Lower heat and simmer until vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes.
5. Stir in chicken and pasta. Simmer to heat chicken through, about 2 minutes. Stir in basil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot or refrigerate in plastic container and reheat before serving.

Makes 3 24-ounce servings

PER SERVING 328 cal, 28 g pro, 38 g carb, 7 g fat, 2 g sat fat, 52 mg chol, 5 g fiber, 298 mg sodium

Green Tea, Blueberry, and Banana Smoothie

PREP TIME 5 minutes

- 3 Tbsp water
- 1 green tea bag
- 2 tsp honey
- 1¹/₂ c frozen blueberries
- ¹/₂ med banana
- ³/₄ c calcium-fortified light vanilla soy milk

1. In small glass measuring cup or bowl, microwave water on high until steaming hot. Add tea bag and allow to brew 3 minutes. Remove tea bag. Stir honey into tea until it dissolves.
2. In blender with ice-crushing ability, combine berries, banana, and milk.
3. Add tea to blender. Blend ingredients on ice crush or highest setting until smooth. (Some blenders may require additional water to process the mixture.) Pour smoothie into tall glass and serve.

Makes 1 16-ounce serving

PER SERVING 299 cal, 5 g pro, 69 g carb, 3 g fat, 0 g sat fat, 0 mg chol, 8 g fiber, 74 mg sodium

Note If stored for several hours in a Thermos, shake vigorously before pouring. The smoothie will be tasty but thinner than when freshly made.

Elizabeth Somer, RD, is author of *The Food & Mood Cookbook* and editor of *Nutrition Alert*, a nutrition research newsletter.

Devin Alexander is a chef and food writer in Los Angeles, where she owns Café Renée Catering.